

MEMORIES OF THREE FAMILIES WHO LIVED IN ALTON ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

When we were children, between 1910 and 1920, there was a picture hanging on Grandma Link's wall, in her house at 313 Henry Street, across from St. Mary's Catholic Church. The picture showed a street in Sonnenberg, near Weisbaden, Germany. The hotel and brewery in the picture was pointed out as the place of business of our great, great, great, grandfather, Johann Sebastian Jackel. He had been born on June 10, 1759 in Sonnenberg.

One of Johann Sebastian Jackel's sons, Philip Ludwig Jackel, born October 2, 1802, in Sonnenberg, came to the United States with his family in 1837. Philip Ludwig Jackel was a farmer in St. Clair County, Illinois, (near Millstadt) until he moved to Alton, Illinois, and started a brewery. Later, the brewery was known as the Bluff City Brewery, at Brown and Pearl Streets. Brown Street was known as State Road at that time, and the brewery was in the country. We were told that Grandpa Jackel chose that spot because the flavor of the water in the creek was good for making beer.

Philip Ludwig Jackel applied for citizenship on January 4, 1838, and it was granted on October 24, 1844. His witness was John Keck. The naturalization papers are recorded in the St. Clair County Court House at Belleville, Illinois. The spelling of the Jackel name was changed at that time to Jeckel.

In addition to the land surrounding the brewery on State Road (also known as Vandalia Road before it became Brown Street), Philip Ludwig Jeckel bought numerous parcels of land in the Alton area. A deed from 1852 (which I have) shows the purchase at auction of sixty acres in Mournier's Division from the guardians of three Mounier children, Margaret, Victor, and Josephine. Another piece of land owned by Philip Ludwig Jeckel was given to the Evangelical Lutheran Church when the church built its first house of worship at Eighth and Henry Streets in 1852.

Philip Ludwig Jeckel's son, George Carl Jeckel, born February 16, 1834, in Sonnenberg, Nassau, Germany, came to Illinois with his family, when he was three years old. He had three sisters and three brothers, who lived to adulthood. He was the one who worked with his father in the Alton brewery, and took over the management of the business after his father's death in 1854.

George Carl Jeckel married Elizabeth Rustmeier in 1854, in Alton, Illinois. Elizabeth Rustemeier was the daughter of Anton and Elizabeth Burghof Rustemeier. Anton Rustemeier and his family had come to Illinois from Leiberg, Paderborn, Westphalia, Prussia, in July 1845, when Elizabeth was twelve years old. The family had travelled by sail boat to New York, by covered wagon to the Ohio River and by tow boat down the Ohio. My great grandmother often told us of the rigors of that trip.

Anton Rustemeier was a farmer and settled near Alton. He and one of the children died of cholera in 1848. The cemetery in which he was buried was abandoned and I am not sure of the location now.

My great-grandmother's youngest brother, Frank Rustemeier, was in the Civil War and wrote letters to his sister from Pilot Knob. Later, he moved to California.

My great grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. George Carl Jeckel, had seven children. Five of them grew to adulthood at their home adjacent to the Alton Brewery. The oldest son, George Frederick, born on June 5, 1855, was in business for a short time with H. K. Johnston. Their letterheads in 1881 read, "Johnston, Jeckel and Co. - Agricultural Implements, Cor. Second and State Streets." Their partnership was dissolved in 1882, and by 1884 George F. Jeckel had moved to Berger, Missouri. His letterheads there read, "Wedepohl and Jeckel - Farm Machinery and Buggies, Farm and Spring Wagons, Berger, Mo." Later in 1907, George F. Jeckel died in Hermann, Missouri. He was buried in the Alton City Cemetery, on the same lot on which his grandfather Jeckel, his parents sister and brother have been buried now.

Other children of Mr. and Mrs. George Carl Jeckel were, Emma, Eleanor, (Lenora), Anthony, Elizabeth, Lillie, and Carl Frederick. Emma married Jacob Links, my grandfather. Lenora married Joseph Pfeffer and one of their children is Mrs. Adolph Miller of Brown Street. Anthony Jeckel died in infancy, and Elizabeth died in childhood from smallpox. Lillie married Arnold Klein (whose name was shortened from Kleinschnittger). Carl F. Jeckel, who changed the spelling of his name to Yeakel, married Ida Turreff. She and ten of her children moved to California, early in the 1920's, following an automobile accident in which Carl F. was injured, resulting in a nervous breakdown and loss of his numerous business interests. Carl and Ida Yeakel's youngest son, Warren, remained in Alton and was reared by his aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pfeffer. In recent years, Warren Yeakel has moved to California to join his brothers, near Los Angeles.

George Carl Jeckel died on July 2, 1872, from dropsy. His widow decided to sell the brewery and move to town. The Netzhammer family purchased the home and brewery. They operated the brewery until recent years. Some of the buildings and the house have not been changed appreciably on the exterior.

My grandmother, Emma Jeckel Links, was one of the best grandmothers anyone could have had. She and my grandfather, Jacob Links, born November 16, 1850, who had been a druggist with Mr. Weigler on Second Street, near Henry Street, were married on May 1, 1877, in Alton. Jacob Links had come from Marzheim, by Landau, Rheinfalz, Germany, when he was fifteen years old, because he did not believe in compulsory military training, and because some of his older brothers and sister had migrated to the United States and Australia. Jacob had attended the Academy of Landau and knew Latin well. He used quite a few French words with his German ones, having lived near the French border. He was described to us as a vivacious and debonair man. His first born child, Lillie Eva Links, did not get to know him personally, as he died when she was nine months old, on March 30, 1881, from pneumonia.

After the death of her husband, my grandmother, Emma Jeckel Links, felt she should support herself and her daughter. She had been trained in needlework and lace making at the Ursuline Convent in Alton and decided she could succeed in the millinery business. She bought a hat shop from her husband's sister, Mrs. Anna Stahlberg.

The millinery store was at 622 East Broadway, next to Fishbach's house. My grandmother, great grandmother, mother, great aunt Lillie and great uncle Carl lived above the store until they moved into a two story house at 313 Henry Street. This house had a wide front porch, with an open porch above it on the second floor level. As children, we were thrilled to watch parades from the second floor porch.

Many happy times were spent with Grandma Links and Tante (Lillie Jeckel) at the millinery store. The beautiful and colorful ribbons, veiling, flowers, and feather decorations stirred romantic thoughts in our heads. There was the continuous stream of customers who liked to visit while their hats were being made. There was the Lindley ice cream parlor next door and the vantage point in the store window for watching circus parades. There was the cistern in the back yard, from which we liked to pull up the bucket. In retrospect, I believe we learned more about birth, death, marriage and other family situations while we were visiting behind the scenes at the millinery store than many people learn in a life time.

My father and mother, William Henry Gissal and Lillie Links Gissal, have lived in Alton throughout their lives. They sent their three children to college and thereafter, all of us children moved to other parts of the United States. After a period of years, I returned to Alton and married. My husband and I have no children to carry on our Alton heritage, but perhaps some other member of the family shall return to do this. The mobility in present day American families has sent one of my nephews to live with his family in Hawaii, (He is Philip George Gissal, born November 11, 1934, in St. Louis, Missouri), so the next turn of events may send some other niece, nephew, or cousin back to our native soil.

Returning to the beginning of this historical sojourn, my brother and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Philip Emil Geissal (He changed the spelling of his name from Gissal to Geissal, hoping other would be able to pronounce it) of Washington, D. C., went to Europe in 1958. Imagine their delight to find a street in Sonnenberg, near Weisbaden, Germany, which looked just like the picture on Grandma Link's wall. The buildings were standing as they had stood for hundreds of years. It was like a reunion with an old friend. Checking of church records in Germany showed the birth records of family members as given here.

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